

# First Steps to School Readiness



## ANNUAL REPORT 2009

# Director's Message

## Dear Friends:

Thank you for your commitment to the future of South Carolina: **our youngest children.**

A child's most important years of development are those leading up to the kindergarten door. First Steps is committed to helping children five and younger receive the **quality education, health, family and transition supports** they need to arrive at school ready to succeed. At First Steps --all across South Carolina-- our focus is on matching the needs of our youngest children to the early childhood experiences that help them prepare for school success. We work community by community, leveraging the best early learning services in both **public and private** settings, to ensure that each of South Carolina's children is prepared to reach his or her full potential in school and in life.

This year was an important one for First Steps, as we launched a comprehensive, statewide strategic planning effort to **ensure our limited resources are having maximum impact** for our state's children. We've listened to over 700 voices who came to our regional early childhood summits as delegates from their counties through the fall. As we couple their ideas, dreams, and analyses with our state-level research, our trustees will put forth an early learning vision for the future!

**Thank you for all you do for South Carolina's youngest learners.**

**They are on the journey of their lives!**



Susan W. DeVenny



# About First Steps

## **Who we are.**

First Steps is South Carolina's school readiness agency. We help prepare the state's young children (ages birth to five) for school success.

### **First Steps Legislation**

"There is established South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness, a comprehensive, results-oriented initiative for improving early childhood development by providing, through county partnerships, public and private funds and support for high-quality early childhood development and education services for children by providing support for their families' efforts toward enabling their children to reach school ready to learn."

--SECTION 59-152-10

## **Why we do it.**

Investments in early childhood pay big dividends. Decades of scientific research suggest that the early years critically influence a child's success in school and life. Healthy development and enriched early learning experiences for young children can shape their long-term successes, and reduce costs associated with later school retention, remediation, crime and social services.

## **How we do it.**

First Steps provides or expands early learning services to young children, their families, and the early care and education providers touching their lives. These services span five key areas:

- Family Strengthening
- Healthy Start
- Quality Child Care
- Early Education
- School Transition



## **Where you can find us.**

First Steps operates in each of South Carolina's 46 counties, matching local solutions to local needs. Each county is home to a local First Steps Partnership, overseen by a local board of directors. Partnerships tailor their program investments to the needs of their own communities, using ongoing needs and resources assessments, and evaluating results on an annual basis.

First Steps is also the South Carolina sponsor of two nationally acclaimed home visitation programs for families: Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and Parents as Teachers (PAT). Additionally, since 2007, we have partnered with the South Carolina Department of Education to offer full-day prekindergarten through the South Carolina Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP).

The agency provides both funding and technical assistance to the state's network of independent, non-profit First Steps County Partnerships so that services are available to the children who need them.

**SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS TO SCHOOL READINESS  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
2008-2009**

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## GOALS

"The goals for South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness are to:

1. Provide parents with access to the support they might seek and want to strengthen their families and to promote the optimal development of their preschool children;
2. Increase comprehensive services so children have reduced risk for major physical, developmental, and learning problems;
3. Promote high quality preschool programs that provide a healthy environment that will promote normal growth and development;
4. Provide services so all children receive the protection, nutrition, and health care needed to thrive in the early years of life so they arrive at school ready to learn; and
5. Mobilize communities to focus efforts on providing enhanced services to support families and their young children so as to enable every child to reach school healthy and ready to learn."

--SECTION 59-152-30

## 2009 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

### Family Strengthening

Learning begins at home. Because parents are a child's first and best teachers, First Steps works to support families in this important role - while respecting the personal environment, customs and culture of each. First Steps is strengthening South Carolina families by providing:

- Evidence-based home visitation, designed to support healthy development and proven practices. Trained educators provide health screenings, interactive parenting tips and referrals to local resources.
- Family Literacy programs, designed to nurture the home as a learning environment.
- Parent mentoring, designed to assist parents in enhancing play and literacy interactions with their children, at home or in group settings.

### 2008-2009 Family Strengthening Highlights:

The families of more than **2,700 high-risk South Carolina preschoolers** participated in more than **39,750 parent education home visits** during FY09 – receiving roughly **41,500 hours** of combined service.

Of these families, **more than three-quarters (76%)** were eligible for federal TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) benefits as a result of income totaling **less than 50% of the federal poverty** definition. **More than 40%** of these households contained a mother with **less than a high school diploma**.

First Steps' home visitation programs are making a difference in the lives of **South Carolina's rural poor** – bringing evidence-based services directly to families when transportation is a barrier.



## **Healthy Start**

Poor health can inhibit a child's development during the critical early years when children's brains and bodies are developing in ways that will shape their futures. Programs like Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) are here to help.

NFP is a nationally acclaimed nurse home visitation program that helps transform the lives of first-time, low-income mothers and their children. NFP Nurse Home Visitors work with new mothers to:

1. Improve pregnancy outcomes by promoting health related behaviors,
2. Improve child health and development by helping parents provide responsible and competent care, and
3. Improve the economic self-sufficiency of the family by helping parents develop a vision for their own future, plan future pregnancies, continue their education, and find work.



Nurse Family Partnership is the most rigorously tested program of its kind. Randomized, controlled trials have shown:

- Improved prenatal health
- Fewer childhood injuries
- Improved school readiness
- Fewer subsequent pregnancies
- Increased intervals between births
- Increased maternal employment



## **2008-2009 Healthy Start Highlights:**

Thanks to the generosity of the South Carolina General Assembly, First Steps was able to provide a \$1 million public investment to bring NFP to South Carolina. We are extremely proud of our partnership with The Duke Endowment, The Blue Cross/Blue Shield Foundation of South Carolina, and The Children's Trust, whose added investments allowed the state to **launch six Nurse Family Partnership sites** in South Carolina this year. At capacity, these sites will provide evidence-based services to more than **600 South Carolina first-time mothers**.

Through the braiding of public, private, and philanthropic investments at state and local levels, this innovative **public-private partnership** is projected to provide as much as **\$21 million** in services to low-income, first time mothers **over the next seven years**.

## **Nurse Family Partnership sites have been launched in the following counties:**

- Anderson
- Charleston/Berkeley/Dorchester
- Greenville
- Horry
- Lexington/Richland
- Spartanburg

## Quality Childcare

Recent estimates show more than 118,000 of South Carolina's children under age 6 -- at least 35% -- are enrolled in one of the state's 2,835 regulated childcare settings, allowing more than 76,500 parents to go to work. Because childcare can profoundly shape a child's early development, First Steps supports child care teachers and staff statewide. First Steps offers assistance to child care providers in the following ways:



**Improving Quality.** Research says childcare quality is directly related to child outcomes, so First Steps works to help providers year-round with training and support to offer safe and healthy environments, build effective relationships with children and their families, and provide a stimulating learning environment for children.

**Improving Affordability.** High-quality care may come at a cost that makes quality inaccessible to many families, so First Steps works to enhance the availability of full and partial childcare scholarships for families.

**Providing Staff Training.** Child-care staff and teachers enhance their knowledge and skills to improve the quality of their services through training and technical assistance provided by First Steps.

**Advancing Credentials of Staff.** First Steps and its partners work to make college-level coursework and advanced degrees more accessible to child-care staff through T.E.A.C.H. and the credentialing arm of the agency, the South Carolina Center for Child Care Career Development (CCCCD is made possible by a generous federal grant through the South Carolina Department of Social Services).

### **RESEARCH SAYS:**

Low-income children who received high-quality, full-time childcare from infancy through age 5:

- **Scored higher on cognitive tests** from toddler-age to age 21;
- Completed **more years of education** and were **more likely to attend a four-year college**;
- Were more likely to **have their first child later** in life; and
- Had **mothers** who were more likely to achieve a **higher education level and employment status** - particularly for teen mothers. (The Carolina Abecedarian Project, UNC-Chapel Hill)

At-risk children are impacted the most by high-quality childcare, and those **benefits reach well into the elementary school years**. (The Children of the Child Cost Quality and Outcomes Study Go to School, 1999)

## 2008-2009 Quality Childcare Highlights:

Participating centers received more than **5,800 on-site technical assistance visits**, totaling more than **8,900 hours of direct services** to these teachers and center staff.

**242 childcare providers --with nearly 10,000 South Carolina children in their care--** participated in First Steps' intensive quality enhancement efforts during FY09. First Steps' quality enhancement strategies are producing measurable results -- with the **average center improving** its score on a research-based measure of classroom quality by **more than 11% during FY09**.

## **Early Education**

High quality pre-kindergarten has been shown to be especially beneficial in preparing high-risk children for school -- and life -- success. First Steps is working to expand high-quality 4-year-old kindergarten and other preschool opportunities in public and private settings.



South Carolina First Steps works in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Education to administer the state's Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP). The program offers full-day 4-year-old kindergarten to income-eligible children residing in the 37 school districts involved in South Carolina's school equity funding suit, *Abbeville County School District et al. vs. South Carolina*.

Eligible families may enroll their children in either a public school or in an approved private, community or faith-based setting. First Steps oversees the preschool programs in the community and private settings, assuring

they meet state quality and accountability requirements and providing training and support to each participating center throughout the school year. Eligible CDEPP families may enroll their children in any First Steps' approved provider whose location meets their needs.

Through its network of county partnerships, First Steps also works to expand preschool services to meet the needs present in their community – often contracting with school districts, child care, or Head Start programs to expand existing services for families.

## **2008-2009 Early Education**

### **Highlights:**

**521 CDEPP students** were served in **42 private / community-based settings**.

**13 local First Steps partnerships** funded the **expansion of public school 4K** services. Nine local partnerships funded full-day preschool services, 2 provided additional half-day programs, and 2 expanded existing half-day programs at their school districts.

The SC Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP) offers:

- Full-day 4K (6.5 hours), five days per week during the 180-day school year
- Tuition and transportation funding to providers
- A research-based curriculum for children

*To qualify for CDEPP, children must:*

- Be 4 years old by Sept. 1
- Qualify for free/reduced-price lunch or Medicaid; and
- Live in one of the 37 school districts involved in the school funding equity lawsuit: Abbeville, Allendale, Bamberg 1, Bamberg 2, Barnwell 19, Barnwell 29, Barnwell 45, Berkeley, Chesterfield, Clarendon 1, Clarendon 2, Clarendon 3, Dillon 1, Dillon 2, Dillon 3, Florence 1, Florence 2, Florence 3, Florence 4, Florence 5, Hampton 1, Hampton 2, Jasper, Laurens 55, Laurens 56, Lee, Lexington 4, Marion 1, Marion 2, Marion 7, Marlboro, McCormick, Orangeburg 3, Orangeburg 4, Orangeburg 5, Saluda or Williamsburg.



## **School Transition**

First Steps' nationally recognized Countdown to Kindergarten program is designed to connect families and schools during the summer months prior to kindergarten entry. These home visits strengthen critical bonds and smooth this important transition into the classroom for both children and their families. Kindergarten teachers make six visits to their future students' homes during the summer -- sharing important tips, modeling effective literacy practices, and preparing students and parents for the upcoming year.

Participants are screened for eligibility across a set of variables known to be barriers to school entry, so that resources can be targeted to those most in need. Countdown children and their families are introduced to specific practices and materials that will be used in kindergarten classrooms, and receive a Countdown to Kindergarten Toolkit (books, puzzles, clay, blocks, floor mats, etc.). The toolkit is designed to introduce children to the early learning standards in South Carolina's kindergarten classrooms. Children learn alongside their teachers during the summer sessions, and keep the toolkit to use with their families. At the end of their Countdown experience, children take a "field trip" to school, visiting their very own classroom before school begins.

### **2008-2009 School Transition Highlights:**

During the summer of 2008, First Steps Partnerships in **27 counties** partnered with local school districts to enroll **984 rising kindergartners** in Countdown to Kindergarten.



**South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness  
Income & Expenses  
2008-2009**

	Thousands	
	Expenses	Income
<b>AGENCY INCOME</b>		
<b>State Appropriations</b>		
General Funds		\$18,196
EIA Funds		1,884
Child Development Education Pilot Program (CDEPP)		3,200
<b>Total State Appropriations</b>		<b>23,280</b>
<i>Mid-Year Cuts</i>		<b>(3,628)</b>
<b>Revised State Funds FY09</b>		<b>\$19,652</b>
<b>Federal /Interagency Grants</b>		
US Department of Education (Early Reading First)		\$1,631
US Department of Health & Human Services -via SC DSS (T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood)		3,247
US Department of Labor (WIA)		296
SC Department of Social Services (TANF)		2,200
<b>Total Federal/Interagency Grants</b>		<b>\$7,374</b>
<b>Private/Other Contributions</b>		
Children's Trust Fund (Nurse-Family Partnership)		\$330
Interest		558
SC Tax Check-off Receipts		18
<b>Total Private/Other Contributions</b>		<b>\$906</b>
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>		<b>\$27,932</b>

<b>AGENCY EXPENSES</b>		
<b>County Partnership Services</b>		
Local Services (46 partnerships)	\$15,061	
Central Operating Support	1,052	
<b>Total County Partnerships</b>	<b>\$16,113</b>	
<b>Direct Services to Children- State Level Programs</b>		
Child Development Education Pilot Program	\$2,699	
CDEPP Carry Forward (into FY10 program)	501	
Nurse-Family Partnership	198	
Countdown to Kindergarten	65	
<b>Total Direct Services to Children</b>	<b>\$3,463</b>	
<b>Direct Services to Providers- State Level Programs</b>		
Child Care Career Development Center- Greenville (T.E.A.C.H.)	\$3,247	
Early Reading First	1,631	
Workforce Development (WIA)	296	
<b>Total Direct Services to Providers</b>	<b>\$5,174</b>	
<b>Interagency Collaboration</b>		
SC Department of Social Services (School readiness services to TANF families)	\$2,000	
<b>Accountability and Oversight</b>		
State Office	\$1,182	
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$27,932</b>	